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Factors Affecting the Choice of Recreation Providers – A Conceptual Model

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the extent in which factors related to opportunities influence consumers' decisions when choosing a recreation provider. To this end, the author conducted a study on a number of 221 persons residing in urban areas from Romania. Twelve factors of influence to the decision-making process have been assessed after being grouped into categories: location-related factors, service-related factors, peer-related factors and other factors. Based on the results, a conceptual model showing that all considered factors influence significantly consumers' behavior was created, while a more detailed analysis shows the average importance given to each factor by the consumers.

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Keywords: local recreation; artistic activities ; cultural activities; sporting activities; entertainment activities; consumer behaviour; location-related factors; service-related factors; peer-related factors.

1. Introduction

Every person needs recreation. Recreation, as regarded by many individuals, is a source of casual fun or pleasure (Kraus, 1997). Recreation may be passive or active, but whatever the form, people can either create their own means of recreation or they can address to providers of recreational services.

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The services that are supplied on the market in terms of recreation are determined by consumer preferences, which are expressed through patterns of demand (Tribe, 2011). This paper's aim is not to analyze the people's preferences in terms of recreation, but to highlight and quantify the influence of the most important factors that determine one to choose the provider for the preferred recreational activity.

This research topic has interested both scholars and public institutions for more than two decades. In the United States, More, Echelberger and Koenemann (1990) wrote an evaluative paper revealing the factors that affect recreation participation in Vermont. In the United Kingdom, Popham and Mitchell (2005) investigated the impact of social, economic and family circumstances on participation in weekly leisure time exercise in Britain, whereas Hutchinson (2011) focused on family and community factors that influence the leisure participation in Nova Scotia. In Canada, two opposite researches have been carried out. The first, assesses the factors that affect participation within the environment, family, and persons (Law, 2002), while the second inquires about the factors that prevent people from participating to recreational activities (BC Healthy Living Alliance, n.d.).

Torkildsen (2005) has grouped the influences on leisure participation in three categories: personal and family influences (such as age, gender, marital status, interests and preoccupations...), social and situational circumstances (such as occupation, disposable income, time available...), and opportunities (such as resources available, access and location, costs...). This paper targets the latter category of factors - opportunities, taking into consideration a set of factors rarely mentioned in specialized studies.

2. Method

Understanding the behavioral intentions in choosing a recreation provider implied the following stages:

- Survey deployment and data collection;
- Explanatory factor analysis on the collected data;
- Confirmatory factor analysis and development of the conceptual model;
- Descriptive analysis of the factors.

The survey was based on a questionnaire divided into five sections. The first four sections concerned the quantification of the influence of each factor in the process of choosing a recreation provider. Each section had the same format and content and referred, in order, to the four following recreational activity groups: sporting, entertainment, artistic, and cultural.

Respondents were asked to note on a Likert 7-point scale from 1 "Not important at all" to 7 "Very important" the measure in which their decision when opting for a recreation provider is influenced by the following factors:

- Proximity to home;
- Proximity to workplace;
- Proximity to means of transportation stops;
- Price of services;
- Quality of services;
- Novelty of services;
- Personnel qualification;
- Mass-media promotion of the services;
- Peer recommendations;
- Preferences of the people *with* whom they participate;
- Preferences of the people *for* whom they participate;
- Possibility to participate in parent-children activities.

The last section of the survey was dedicated to demographic questions. From 1000 questionnaires that have been distributed online via social networks or e-mail, 226 have been validly completed, namely a response rate of 22.6%. On reasons of respondents not belonging to the target group, other 5 questionnaires have been eliminated from the research.

Processing of data collected from the survey was made using IBM SPSS Statistics Base. Results have been automatically exported from the online surveys to the statistical software and missing values corresponding to unanswered questions from otherwise valid questionnaires have been imputed in order to perform the explanatory factor analysis. The factor extraction method used was principal component analysis, and the rotation method was Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

Data modeling for the confirmatory factor analysis was made using the IBM SPSS Amos software. For each of the four categories of recreation providers (sporting, entertainment, artistic and cultural), a conceptual model that fits the empirical data was created after obtaining acceptable values for the following set of indices: the minimum discrepancy (CMIN/DF), the comparative fit index (CFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA).

3. Results

In order to establish what are the underlying dimensions of consumer choice regarding providers of recreational services, four analyses have been carried out, one for each of the following categories: sporting, entertainment, artistic, and cultural. The outcome of the principal components analysis is shown in Figure 1. Even though the extent to which variables load on the principal components varies from one case to another, a pattern indicating four principal components is revealed. The four depicted principal components are: location-related factors, service-related factors, peer-related factors, and other factors.

Figure 1. Results of the Principal Component Analyses

Rotated Component Matrix ^a																
	Choice of sporting providers				Choice of entertainment providers				Choice of artistic providers				Choice of cultural providers			
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Proximity to home		0,784					0,828				0,804				0,845	
Proximity to workplace		0,713					0,836				0,795				0,813	
Proximity to transportation		0,662					0,554				0,775				0,681	
Price	0,718				0,762				0,500				0,692			
Quality	0,825				0,816				0,831				0,822			
Novelty	0,525				0,713				0,799				0,806			
Personnel qualification	0,752				0,740				0,774				0,701			
Mass-media promotion				0,588		0,655				0,570				0,506		
Recommendations			0,613			0,593				0,666				0,634		
Preferences of people WITH whom participate			0,827			0,805				0,765				0,838		
Preferences of people FOR whom participate			0,731			0,663				0,816				0,797		
Possibility of parent-children activities				0,802				0,877				0,927				0,881

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.^a

Furthermore, the confirmatory factor analysis showed that in all four analyses, all dimensions and factors taken into consideration contribute significantly to consumers' behavior in terms of choice of the recreation providers. Table 1 shows the values of the model fit indices obtained after calculating the estimates and performing the confirmatory factor analyses.

Table 1. Results of the Confirmatory Factor Analyses

	Model Fit Indices			
CMIN/DF	2,734	2,880	2,505	2,532
CFI	0,852	0,879	0,903	0,892
RMSEA	0,089	0,092	0,083	0,083

Based on the very similar results obtained in both the principal component analyses and confirmatory factor analyses, one generic conceptual model has been created. Figure2 shows the resulting conceptual model that offers a graphical overview of factors that influence consumer behaviour in choosing a recreation provider.

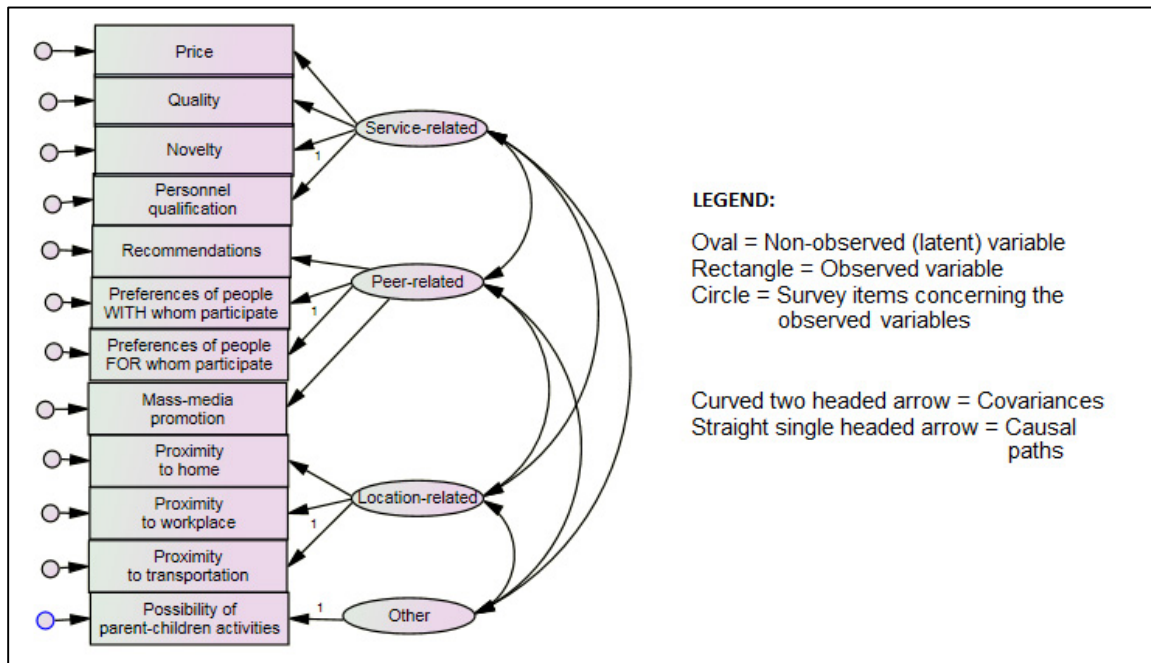


Fig. 2. Conceptual Model regarding the Factors Affecting the Choice of Recreation Providers.

Research also shows the average importance given to each factor by the consumers when choosing a recreation provider specialised in sporting, entertainment, and artistic or cultural services. Figure 3 shows the results of the descriptive analysis. When interpreting the results, be advised that the mean can take values between 1 and 7, where proximity to 1 indicates lack of importance and proximity to 7 denotes a high importance attributed. Please note that in the analysis of the last factor - Possibility of parent-children activities, the sample size has been reduced to only those respondents who declared having children in the demographic questions section.

Figure 3. Influences of individual factors on consumer behavior

	Proximity to home*	Proximity to workplace*	Proximity to transportation*	Price	Quality	Novelty*	Personnel qualification*	Mass-media promotion*	Recommendations*	Preferences of people WITH whom participate*	Preferences of people FOR whom participate*	Possibility of parent-children activities**	
Choice of sporting providers	5,42	3,19	4,18	5,53	6,25	4,64	5,77	3,41	5,00	4,11	3,30	4,93	Mean
	0,13	0,16	0,17	0,11	0,11	0,13	0,12	0,13	0,11	0,14	0,16	0,52	Std. Error of Mean
Choice of entertainment providers	4,28	2,93	3,95	5,63	5,78	5,21	5,57	3,98	5,28	4,93	4,33	5,45	Mean
	0,15	0,15	0,16	0,11	0,14	0,13	0,12	0,13	0,12	0,13	0,16	0,45	Std. Error of Mean
Choice of artistic providers	3,33	2,79	3,77	5,04	5,65	5,27	5,52	4,41	5,04	5,02	4,39	5,45	Mean
	0,14	0,14	0,15	0,12	0,14	0,13	0,13	0,14	0,13	0,13	0,16	0,46	Std. Error of Mean
Choice of cultural providers	3,15	2,45	3,71	4,91	5,73	5,23	5,17	4,16	5,14	4,98	4,43	5,52	Mean
	0,13	0,13	0,15	0,12	0,12	0,13	0,14	0,13	0,11	0,13	0,16	0,44	Std. Error of Mean
Valid percent 100% *n=220; 95%; margin of error (+/- 6,5%) **n=31; 95%; margin of error (+/- 17,6%)													

When asked to mention other factors that may influence their choice of recreation providers, only 7 respondents (0,03%) mentioned hygiene and schedule (two occurrences), previous experiences, “the way the personnel treats clients” and quality of the neighborhood (one occurrence). Although the respondents have not quantified the influence of these factors, adjoining them to the ones already included in the survey creates a broader overview of the aspects taken into consideration when opting for a recreation provider.

4. Discussion

The aim of the research was to assess in what measure factors related to opportunities (Torkildsen, 2005) influence consumers’ decisions when choosing a recreation provider. Research revealed three dimensions that weigh significantly in the consumers’ decision-making process: location-, service- and peer-related factors; and another dimension with a great influence for a specific population: the possibility to engage in parent-children activities.

Research shows that service-related factors, and among them especially the quality of services, will influence the consumers’ decision when it comes to choosing a recreation provider greater than other factors. Respondents having children will also tend to base their decision on the possibility offered by recreation providers to engage in parent-children activities. Clients will opt for a sporting or entertainment provider closer to their home and, maybe, to means of transportation, rather than to one in the proximity of their workplace; while in the case of choosing an artistic or cultural provider, neither one of these factors is of great importance. Friends’ recommendations weigh more in the clients’ decision-making process than the mass-media promotion of the services. Also, the accompanying person’s preferences have a great influence on one’s decision concerning the recreation provider.

A limitation of the current study lies in its little generalizability caused by the reduced dimension and non-randomness of the sample. Also, limitations related to online survey distribution apply to this study.

Notwithstanding, the study is significant for presenting a broader view of the consumers’ behavior when choosing a recreation provider, that assess opportunity-related factors, rather than personal, family, social or situational factors, that practitioners operating in the field of commercial local recreation, as well as scholars interested in this field of study can benefit from.

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